

A HUMANISTIC CATECHISM FOR SOCIOLOGY.

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Introduction:

In this essay I propose to discuss the thought of Karl Marx by reference to his Theses on Feuerbach. The Theses occupy an important place in Marx's thought. Giddens notes that The Theses are a key document in the transition from the 1844 Manuscripts and The German Ideology.¹ Why did The Theses have to be written? In this essay I wish to argue that 'The Theses on Feuerbach' have two fundamental focii. These are a) a retrospective critical analysis b) an anticipatory programme. It is the catechetical structure of The Theses which holds these two focii together in organic unity.

- a) The retrospective critical focus concerns Marx's self-clarification with regard to all previous forms of social analysis, that of French Materialists in particular.² In such a focus The Theses function as a document which tells us very clearly what Marx rejects. The Theses point to a whole range of issues for social theory which Marx stamps as invalid.
- b) The anticipatory focus is Marx's bold statement of principle for social theory. The Theses tell us very clearly what Marx is committed to. The Theses point to a whole range of issues for social theory and social reconstruction which Marx considers to be absolutely necessary.

At the centre of his analysis, Marx argued that there was an empirical emphasis. At the beginning of 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' he writes:³ It is hardly necessary to assure the reader who is familiar with political economy that my conclusions are the fruit of an entirely empirical analysis, based upon a careful critical study of political economy.

He also very explicitly argues for a materialist conception of history.⁴ In such a conception Marx stresses the special character of historical development. The empirical desire is matched by a critical concern to face up to the truth concerning the human situation. "It is the task of history, therefore, once the other-world of truth has banished to establish the truth of this world."⁵

This, in a nutshell, provides us with the basic parameters of Marx's thought. Critical, historical, materialist and empirical analysis directed to the human situation. The two sides are represented by 'the critique of heaven' and 'the critique of earth'.⁶

The retrospective critical focus, I take to be 'the critique of heaven'. It is the application of a yardstick, and it is pre-eminently Hegel who is found wanting.⁷ The anticipatory programme involves the active and on-going 'critique of Earth'.⁸ In this sense The Theses represent Marx's 'eschatology of the present'.⁹

The retrospective analysis and the anticipatory programme are two sides of one confession in The Theses. This confession concerns man's place in the world of men. Confession in this sense is not the mere recitation of a creed. It is something more. It is an uncovering of the essence of life; the making apparent of what profoundly motivates; the public declaration of commitment; the revelation of deepest conviction. It is something active - requiring the all-embracing involvement of the confessor.

A catechism can be characterized in the following terms:

- it has an underlying dynamic of universal scope for human life in its entirety - it is a formulation of belief in which the human-confessional aspect (as opposed to the rational-formulation aspect) is primary - the intention is to set out a basis for argument rather than the fully elaborated argument itself - there is a pedagogical concern to impart a certain 'truth' to a would-be initiate - it is set forth as an expression of the first step in the integration of faith and conduct.

In sum a catechism can be characterized as 'the germ of a new world outlook'.¹⁰

With Petrovic I would agree that Marx's thought from beginning to end is a revolutionary humanism. Only when it is considered as a whole does it serve as the basis for the programme of revolutionary struggle which is intended.¹¹ Nevertheless, I would maintain that in the structure of Marx's logic there is throughout, a distinct confessional aspect. It is this aspect which constitutes the paramount thrust of The Theses. This does not mean that Marx's writings are 'theology' or 'metaphysics'. It is clear that Marx would emphatically deny such an ascription to his work.¹²

I will return to this point at the conclusion of this essay. I am of the opinion that there is a confessional aspect always present in his thought. The term aspect is crucial. By it I am trying to argue that Marx's confession, whilst very important, is not the basis for his thought. On the contrary, I am suggesting that Marx's confession points us to the basis of Marx's thought: man himself. The pointing to this basis is the uppermost concern of The Theses. Robert Tucker argues that an Augustinian-like structure pertains to Marx's thought.¹³ According to Tucker, Marx's thought shares the following common characteristics with christianity: i) an aspiration to totality of scope ii) a concept of a total regeneration for mankind iii) a view of all existence under the aspect of

history iv) a view which emphasizes the unity of theory and practise - an integral relation between world-view and world-action.¹⁴

The following analysis will show how The Theses fulfill the criteria Tucker lists as characteristic of the religious structure of Marx's thought. In treating The Theses on Feuerbach as a rudimentary form of humanistic catechism I intend to show how Marx's empirical concern, critical desire and materialistic conception of history organically spring from his underlying commitment. Man is the human world, the state, society.¹⁵ For Marx this confession leads social theory to explicitly humanistic roots. It is this radical humanism which leads the way in his retrospective critique of 'all previous materialism': it also points the way ahead to a revolutionary praxis.¹⁶

The Essence of Feuerbach:

Marx refers to Feuerbach in the following terms:¹

Feuerbach is the only one who has a serious critical attitude to the Hegelian dialectic and who has made genuine discoveries in this field. He is in fact the true conqueror of the old philosophy.

Feuerbach, a fellow Young-Hegelian, was possibly the most influential of the group apart from Marx himself.² He was the author of The Essence of Christianity (1844) which Marx acclaimed enthusiastically. 'Feuerbach was the 'brook of fire' through which all speculative philosophers and theologians must go if they wanted to reach things as they are in reality.'³ Simply put, The Essence, has as its theme, the refutation of christianity. Religion is a projection of man's unsatisfied needs. Man alone can satisfy his own needs yet since he feels he cannot satisfy them, he projects himself into an ideal world as an ideal being who is fully self-satisfied - God. As soon as religion is analysed in this way, and thereby unmasked, there is no longer any need for such an ideal creature. Feuerbach put his primary aim in the following terms:⁴

My wish is ... to transform the friends of God into the friends of man, believers into thinkers, devotees of prayer into devotees of work, candidates for the hereafter into students of this world, Christians who by their own profession and admission are half-animal, half-angel, into men, whole men.

Man, to Feuerbach, is the highest being for man.⁵ Man functions, in reality, as the object of himself and should do so. Feeling alone is the object for feeling.⁶ Feuerbach's wish is to transform theology into anthropology⁷, bring back a material essence into sensuous existence, destroy

idealism which tears man out of his true context in nature. He intends to establish a New Philosophy.⁸

Hence we have this categorical imperative: Do not wish to be a philosopher in contrast to being a Man; be nothing more than a thinking Man ...

The point is emphasised by contrast with idealist philosophy:⁹

Man that is, man's essence, is the most real thing ... not the Ego of Kant and Fichte, not the absolute identity of Schelling, not the absolute Mind of Hegel.

Thinking and being are not to be separate. Man is one.

Feuerbach, says Tucker¹⁰, persuaded Marx that there are not two worlds, after all, but only one: the real material world, where man stands on firm and well-rounded earth, inhaling and exhaling all the natural forces.

It is in this persuasion that Marx now turns to a reconsideration of Feuerbach. He finds in him a duality between thought and action¹¹. This has to be surmounted by a merciless and ruthless criticism,¹² and it is in such an attitude that The Theses are framed.

Feuerbach had implemented Hegelian method by criticism of theology and the bible, and had thereby succeeded in 'turning Hegel on his head'¹³. If the Absolute of religion and philosophy (Hegel's of course) is inverted and replaced by man, the concrete conditions of this life, then the mystification is plainly exposed. Feuerbach's method however met some resistance in the Young Hegelian Movement. The Young Hegelians had seen in Hegel's philosophy not a system of 'truth' but a programme to be implemented.¹⁴

The question was one of method. Kamenka asserts that the young Hegelians shared in the faith that it was sufficient to expose the contradictions of empirical reality and hold up against them 'the truly rational'.¹⁵ How was this to be done? Feuerbach's influence was divisive because he opted for an active criticism of the contradictions of philosophy. Within the group that did apply his method another split developed between those who considered it to be a matter of applying it to religion and those who went further and developed a criticism of the foundations of the democratic theory of the state.¹⁶

The question centers on human alienation. One alternative was to criticize religious consciousness by asserting the primacy of 'freedom'. The other saw human freedom as an historical consequence of the materialist critique directed at the conditions under which man exists in an alienated state.

This is the path Marx takes. Says he:¹⁷

I approve of Feuerbach's aphorisms, except for one point: he directs himself too much to nature and too little to politics. But it is politics which happens to be the only link through which contemporary philosophy can become true.

Marx's categorical statement is that there is no other way for the emancipation of philosophy but through the purgatory of a 'Feuer-bach'. (fiery brook).¹⁸ Tucker¹⁹ makes the following observation:

Marx indeed began as a disciple of Hegelianism, but his relation to the Hegelian system was from the start a very peculiar one. If being an Hegelian means accepting Hegelianism as true, then Marx was never at any time an Hegelian. The original impulse of his thought was expressed in the watchword, 'the realization of philosophy' which in turn implied that Hegelianism was not true but ought to be... The idea of making the philosophical arose in Marx's mind as the idea of acting out Hegelianism in real history, of making it true, of translating Hegel's beautiful philosophical dream into reality. The motto of the young Hegelian movement was 'criticism' and Marx in his first period looked to criticism as a means by which the world might be made philosophical.

Commentary on The Theses:

I will follow the 11 Theses in a textual critical fashion, trying by my commentary to show the development of Marx's argument and how his argument culminates with Thesis No.11.

THESIS NUMBER ONE

That the eleven theses are set forth against a back-drop of the history of philosophy is already evident in the initial statement. Self-consciously and with critical intent Marx locates his thought in that history. There is also a practical intention and he does not lay claim to a 'de nouveau' status for his argument. Marx the scientist desires to be seen as an historically aware thinker. In a letter (1843) Marx called to 'merciless criticism of everything existing; merciless in two senses: this criticism must not take fright at its own conclusions and must not shrink from collision with the powers that be.'¹ It is the same motivation which directs Marx in his criticism of Feuerbach. It allows him to come into the closest possible contact with the thought of a fellow young-Hegelian.

It is Feuerbach's attempted 'New Philosophy' which occupies Marx's attention. The 'New Philosophy' had been set forth in a context where Hegel's orthodoxy had proclaimed that Spirit was the ultimately real. As a consequence man is placed in a relative and derivative position. Man is a (mere) manifestation of the all-important and supposedly all-pervasive Absolute Spirit. Feuerbach's transformative criticism had, however, turned Hegel upside down.² Feuerbach started from exactly the opposite position to Hegel.³ He wanted to begin with the concrete, the material and subsequently he would be able to derive Spirit from this.

In a context where the problematics have been so construed, Marx makes his contribution. He continues to work with a Hegelian method (dialectics), but in his own particular way. This is shown in the opening sentence: "The chief defect of all previous materialism (including that of Feuerbach)...." (emphasis added). Avineri suggests that Marx counters Feuerbach's speculative materialist orthodoxy with a thorough-going materialist political philosophy. Marx is concerned to show just what is involved in Feuerbach's own use of his method. The criticism of the thesis (Hegel's) which Feuerbach's writing enshrines, is nevertheless circumscribed by the idealistic structure of Hegel's philosophical construction. The materialism with which Feuerbach seeks to counter Hegel's idealism, is one which, according to Marx, has not (yet) broken through to the radically human side of thought: human sense activity (line 4). Feuerbach does not grasp the radically human side of human relations. Practical activity, subjectivity are misconstrued, (5) Feuerbach does not grasp the significance of revolutionary, practical-critical activity. (1:15)

In Feuerbach's anthropological theology, religion may well be said to be a human construction. But in so far as he conceives of the relation of human ideas to human activity in these (redefined) theological terms, it cannot as such be grounded in a fundamentally humanistic perspective. Marx wishes to go further than simply affirming 'man makes religion; religion does not make man.' Marx does affirm this⁵ but so does Feuerbach whilst idealizing 'the theoretical attitude as the only genuine human attitude' (1:12) Marx wishes to go forward to a consistent materialist affirmation of humanistic principle. Marx is indebted to Feuerbach for being able to come this far and says so.⁶ But it is not just enough to embark on a criticism of religion. The criticism of religion must have a theoretical explanatory purpose in view. The criticism of religion must lead onto the abolition of religion.⁷

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a call to abandon a condition which requires illusions.

Marx underlines his fundamental thesis: Man is the social world.⁸

Feuerbach has criticized religion in such a way that leaves open the possibility for man, critical and religious, to once again lose himself in the ideal world of speculation. Marx says that man loses himself in the world by speculation. Once the matter has been grasped at its material roots however, the danger of being lost in the material world is but a danger inherent in the nature of religious consciousness itself. To set up materialism as the antithesis of idealism is tantamount to proclaiming an alternative religion. That is, when seen in the context of the material root of the matter. In his consideration of Feuerbach, Marx appears to have been left dissatisfied and returns to re-examine Hegel in a merciless and ruthless manner.⁹

Feuerbach's criticism of idealism by means of a passive idealism (1:8) leaves objectivity uncriticized. It remains an abstract concept and so it is left to idealism to deal, but abstractly, with the active side of objectivity. (1:5-8) Idealism, according to Marx, deals with the active side of objectivity; but it does so in an abstract manner. In contradistinction to idealism Marx in his materialism seizes upon the Gegenstand concept and insists that its meaning can only be found in its exclusive orientation to the material of human activity. Marx has begun his criticism of Feuerbach, by seeking for a solution to man's alienation in a reconsideration of human thought activity.

THESIS NUMBER TWO

The first sentence of the second thesis follows on logically from the first thesis. 'The question whether human thinking can pretend to objective truth is not a theoretical question but a practical question.' Materialist theory has been opposed to idealist theory in all previous forms of materialism. It has therefore reflected the Gegenstand-relation of one object over against another. But this 'one-over-against-the-other' is no passive theoretical thing; it is a practical result of human consciousness. (see III:8 praxis). Marx in stressing the practical nature of thought is aligning himself with an active materialism. In Feuerbach's use of 'transformative criticism' the scholasticism (II:6) of idealism re-appears: Feuerbach has concerned himself with materialist theory, and in so far as he considers this as a theoretical matter, he has not been able to stress the active side of thought. He has not grasped the practical, human character of thought. He has grasped the human character of the thinking subject, but has not insisted upon the human nature of the thought-about object. (II:1-3) Human thinking is the material, the practical material which is here examined. It is not, as such, a question of 'theoretical substance but in actual fact it is a practical matter. 'Man must prove the truth ... of his thinking in practice.' (II:3-4) It is an instance of man himself going to work upon the world. And that world as objective 'out-there', is none other than man himself. Marx thus insists that man is at the center of the stage. Such an insistence dispenses with the speculative need of pitting-one-object-over-against-another, giving rise to the theoretical question of whether human thinking is actually 'objective'. Instead we have the practical placed-over-against the scholastic. Theodor Adorno puts it in the following terms:¹⁰

But just as a binding theory of society must have fully immersed itself in its material, so the fact to be processed must itself throw light on the societal totality by virtue of the process which apprehends it. If, however, the method has already rendered it a factum brutum, then no light can subsequently penetrate it

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The 'factum brutum' must be seen in its true light. Man himself, via his thought is considered to be the one who throws light on the material. Man and man alone throws light on the material of science because this material is in fact man's confrontation with himself in practice. Feuerbach may have insisted upon a 'worldly' mode of theorizing; Marx's criticism of all previous materialism involves a 'radically-this-worldly' practical thinking.

THESIS NUMBERS THREE, FOUR & FIVE

Feuerbach's materialism resolves the problem in man's creation of religion by an appeal to an-almost-neutral 'changing of circumstances and education.' Having methodically placed himself in a position where these factors can be seen as 'man himself', Marx proceeds to show why Feuerbach's thought is in two parts. Feuerbach regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuine attitude, by implication placing theoretical activity over against and superior to practical activity. (I:11-14). For Marx it is not a matter of theoretical activity but of revolutionary practice. (III:8) The key is to be found in the term 'self-changing' (Selbstveränderung). Says Tucker:¹¹

Thus for Marx the communist revolution is the means of attaining not material abundance (though that, in his view, will come too) and not justice in the distribution of goods, but the spiritual regeneration of man. This he expresses in his 'Theses on Feuerbach' - a set of notes written in 1845 in which he sketched the Materialist Conception of History - by saying that the change of circumstances effected by revolutionary activity will coincide with 'self change' (Selbsteveränderung). And in the text of The German Ideology he repeats: 'In revolutionary activity, change of self coincides with change of circumstances.' There is no possibility of comprehending the system of Marx at all deeply unless this redemptive idea is seen to lie at the core of it.

Thesis Number Three has the key to Marx's thought in the notion of self-change. It is this notion of human autonomy from which the other Eight theses logically flow. For all its criticism, Feuerbach's materialist philosophy is theoretical (see (I)). The theoretical attitude as the only genuine human activity gives rise, says Marx, to irreconcilable antinomies. Feuerbach's notion of 'sense' is still speculative. It may conceive of a need for empirical observation (V) of the material object, but it has not penetrated to the root. It has not shown that theory itself is only human activity and can only be human activity.

Having laid to rest the last vestiges of a sacred/secular duality in thought, Feuerbach proceeds to replace the old duality with a new one. 'This doctrine has therefore to divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society' (III) Since Feuerbach has not dealt with the 'holy-form' of self-alienation Marx seeks for a solution to this practical problem of a

re-consideration of the relation between the state and the civil society. This re-evaluation is briefly touched upon in IV. As a problem of human historical activity the solution must be found in practical-critical activity. 'Thus for instance once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the heavenly family the former must itself be destroyed in theory and in practice'. (IV:9-12)¹²

We see here (V) how Marx views Feuerbach. The latter has highlighted the dualism in Hegel. A dualism which puts man down. Feuerbach has not achieved a position which contradicts Hegel's speculation with the assertion of a truly revolutionary practice. Feuerbach has criticized Hegel in a speculative manner. He has tried to put man 'up' whilst putting other aspects of man 'down'. 'Theoretical thought' is elevated. Practical activity is down-graded. He has failed to contradict the contradiction inherent in Hegel's 'system'. Having his own form of dualism, Feuerbach does not transcend Hegel by grasping the root.

THESIS NUMBER SIX

Feuerbach's antinomies are held together by an abstract individualism. This forces him to solve any empirical problems in an abstract manner. Feuerbach thus fails to enter upon a criticism of the real nature of man which to Marx is to be found in 'the totality of human relations.' (VI:3-4) Feuerbach's views are abstract; they do not fit with the materialistic intent with which he initially launched his anti-thetical criticism at Hegel's metaphysics. Feuerbach's thought is a theoretical inability to enter into a critical attitude. His individuals are isolated and man's unity is a constructed biological unity. (genus). Marx on the contrary sets forth the kernel of his social thought. For Marx, Feuerbach's 'species being'¹³ can refer to nothing else than the real nature of man. This is the totality of social relations.

THESES NUMBERS SEVEN, EIGHT, NINE & TEN

Standing in the tradition of the critical materialist attitude, Marx takes his critique a step further. The initial irreligious attitude is neutralized when Feuerbach falls back upon 'religious sentiments'. (VII) Feuerbach's reversal of Hegel, practical in its consequences though it may be, is in the end a practical mysticism, which resorts to 'mysteries'. (VIII) Its scientific element obscures the real nature of man. It is thus a materialism which has lost its way. Perhaps it will follow Hegel to an eventual passive accommodation to the forces of religious consciousness¹⁴; nevertheless it is the speculative constructions of 'individuals' and 'civil society' which

prevail. As such it is not a radical materialism; this is illustrated in the fact that it is not a rational materialism (VIII). At one point however, Feuerbach has come very close to an uncovering of reality. It is human activity which is the principle which is at work within its problematics. It is this principle, man himself, which is seeking a breakthrough to the reality of social humanity. (IX) By conceiving of Feuerbach's problems in this way, Marx is able to work through Feuerbach's materialism.

In these theses we have a picture of Marx the reformer of Feuerbach. He is not a reformer in the sense of trying to reconstruct a (more) systematic view upon the same foundation. In his own terms, Marx is a reformer of Feuerbach because, and only because, he scrutinizes Feuerbach's materialism in the light of his own view of human activity. Marx is trying to show how a consideration of man himself will break through the obfuscations of abstract materialism and idealism.

And thus we come to the final thesis (XI). The manner in which Marx has sensitively treated his fellow 'young Hegelian' is indicative of his method. He has not merely wanted to interpret Feuerbach's world, Marx has actively entered into that 'world' for the express purpose of changing it.

THESIS NUMBER ELEVEN

The eleven theses are thus, in sum, a special instance and application of the principle articulated. Marx's active thought has ranged through Feuerbach's materialism. He obtains a sense of its problematics. He has immersed himself in it, but at the same time claims to transcend it. He has offered an immanent critique of Feuerbach. As a scientist he has not just considered his criticism of Feuerbach as a scholastic question. He is not interested in thought as human activity. He has also attempted here to feel his way into Feuerbach's position, just as he had done with Hegel.¹⁵ It is possibly a case of 'thinking out loud transcribed on paper'.¹⁶ But it is to feel not in the abstract, not in a contemplative sense. Marx attempts to humanly appreciate Feuerbach's position in terms of his own view of humanity. The transformative criticism initiated by Feuerbach is here utilized by Marx upon the original transforming criticizer himself.¹⁷ It is a matter of showing how human autonomy has been limited within Feuerbach's thought. Marx's criticism is a concerted effort to push onto an unlimited acceptance of human autonomy. And he does so out of an appreciation for the immanently world-shattering consequences. Feuerbach has come very close and must be honoured. Marx has a deep, active, sensual appreciation for him.¹⁸

Feuerbach is the only one who has a serious and critical relation to Hegel's dialectic, who has made real discoveries in this field, and who has above all overcome the old philosophy.....

Marx does not seem to be too interested in proclaiming that he has discovered something new and revolutionary. It is man in his own environment - the social world - who alone can be this new and active history maker. It is man himself, Marx proclaims, and so Marx is willing to take his place in the social context on such a basis. It is in the central fact of man himself to which Marx gives his allegiance and in which he expresses his unreserved confidence. No need for rational justification. Man is his own justification.

Thus any analysis of the social world will confront man in the facts of social existence. Science as human activity, is ideally placed to grasp the human tendency which reaches out beyond the mere objects. The human tendency is the essence of the facts. Thus in Marx's thought, 'historical consciousness' refers to the preparation in which man becomes the object of his own sense perception. This is none other than the development of human needs because man is the highest being for man, and it is thus the task of history to establish the truth of this human world.¹⁹

Just as Marx has immersed himself in Feuerbach's thought, so, as a man within man's world, Marx sets the stage for a social science of revolutionary practice. It is not just a matter of interpretation it is a matter of change.

Summation of Key Ideas:

Marx's principal concern is with man himself. The realization of human autonomy requires extended exposition - not only in theory but in revolutionary praxis. Here we obtain a sense of the direction in which Marx is driving. Marx begins by applying Hegelian method to the very thing Hegel's philosophy had tended to enshrine - civil society. (III, IV, V). To Feuerbach's method of criticism, Marx, here begins to add a social and historical dimension.¹ At the same time he claims to have radically criticized Feuerbach's method. Marx's chief criticism of Feuerbach is not something derived from external premises applied to the logic of the argument. It is boldly stated at the outset. (I) Whatever else he may have discovered, Feuerbach has failed to appreciate the kernel of the matter. He has not come to acknowledge that it is man, an integrated and free species being of praxis who transforms nature by his needs and desires. Feuerbach is concerned with making 'believers' into 'thinkers'.

Failing however to grasp man in his autonomous activity, Feuerbach must leave man as he is - in self alienation - the thinker and the social actor are separated.

Earlier he had written that it was Feuerbach who had above all overcome the old philosophy.² Marx was fully aware of the seductive character of Hegel's Reason.³ So he found it necessary, as an exercise in self-criticism, we could almost say inoculation, to go beyond and overcome Feuerbach.

In his criticism of Feuerbach, we see Marx narrowing the scope of his considerations down to the basic level where thought can transcend contradiction: man the active social being in his autonomy.⁴ It is important to know what he is rejecting, so as to precisely identify that which he is accepting. Hegel had accepted human autonomy as a primary postulate for his speculative metaphysics.

Feuerbach sees human autonomy as the material end of all criticism.⁵ Marx rejects them both on the basis that human autonomy can only be grasped by the autonomous human act. Only an autonomous act can rescue man from his alienation.⁶

In The Theses this idea is not set forth in fine logic. The Theses are not apologetic. They are not set forth to be argued so much as they are expressive of one thesis - man himself - which is to function as the basis for all future argument. The appeal is quite explicitly ad hominum.⁷

The anti-christian humanism of Hegel which Marx radicalizes, is found in the notion that man, via philosophy transcends himself and becomes divine. Marx on the contrary, considers that man in transcending himself, becomes man; that is he finds himself autonomously in his own activity.⁷

Tucker has indicated that Marx's humanism, in some clear ways, has its source in the anti-christian direction taken by the thought of Hegel.⁸ In terms of such considerations I would suggest that Marx's Theses on Feuerbach should be considered as a radically humanistic catechism.

It is a catechism of a radically humanistic world-view. In inspiration the scope is total; the view is historical; the aim is for man's total self-regeneration; a programme is foreshadowed which expresses the unity of theory with practise.

In its retrospective focus The Theses set forth a view of the dilemma of man's self-alienation. In its anticipatory focus The Theses propose a revolutionary perspective of self-change, as the heart of the programme for overcoming human alienation. Man who is autonomous must therefore become autonomous.

Conclusion: A Humanistic Catechism for Sociology

What is the relation between this humanistic catechism and social theory? This will have to be answered in terms of why Marx figures so prominently in discussions concerning the humanistic basis of sociology.

The confessional aspect, of a particular social theory, is not the same as the basis for theory. The confessional aspect of theory, links theory to its basis by pointing to the fundamental principle which the theorist considers underlies confession, theory and action. In Marx's case his statement 'Man is the social world', is obviously very central for all of his reflections. Human autonomy has a place of honour in the structure of his thought. It leads social theory to its explicitly humanistic roots. (Radix (Latin):root). Marx does not want his theory to be based in this statement as a logical a priori; he wants his theory to be based in man who makes the statement. This means quite simply that all theoretical statements should honour man. For Marx it is his humanistic belief in man.

Marx is the central figure in any discussion of the confessional-aspect of humanistic sociological theory. In so far as sociology has emerged historically with its roots firmly in the tradition of Renaissance Humanism and Enlightenment it is dominated by humanism in various forms. But whereas the confessional-aspect of other types of humanistic sociology prefer to accentuate one side of human functioning, Marx's radical alternative is to place full and undivided trust in man himself. Marx's theory is not a theory like other humanistic social theories. The confessional-aspect of these refer to man's several capacities (to think, to believe, to be artistic, to maintain a realistic relationship with 'values'). The confessional aspect of Marx's theory, in its integral relation to his thought as a whole, refers boldly and unconditionally to man as an active and creative material totality encompassing all of his several capacities.

It is this radically humanistic confession which functions integrally in his theory, pointing us to the heart of his concerns. At the root of man's functioning is man himself. It is this which stamps Marx as an important thinker, if not the most important thinker for humanistic sociology.

By analysing Marx's thought as the reflections of a religious thinker I am not thereby implying that he is any more religious than any other thinker. My conclusion is that it is only his consistently humanistic confession which allows him to form a social theory and programme that is radically humanistic. Other humanistic thinkers have devised theories and programmes which are more or less humanistic in intention. They have not however confessed to the human basis for humanism in such a consistent manner.

Consequently their theories and programmes do not expose as clearly their humanistic concern as a root concern. But to Marx the issue is clear:¹

To be radical is to grasp things by the root.
But for man the root is man himself.

What then is the relationship between The Theses and social theory? The Theses, as a catechism, are a manual for a 'baptism of fire'. In understanding this catechism the candidate for confirmation in revolutionary praxis is grounded in a method which will enable him to assert and re-assert his only hope in life and in death: the method is simply to throw oneself totally into the task of critic of humanity on the side of humanity. Man, as social scientist, teacher and political organizer, has a three-fold vocation which comes to expression in empirical desire with critical concern - a radically-this-worldly concept of historical development.

Just as Marx's view of society can be summed up in the phrase: man is society; society is man; so also the science of man, according to Marx, must be none other than Man himself. Sociology cannot be something that is placed over against man to be the judge of man. Man himself must take the position of autonomous critic capable of exposing all conditions which deny this essential insight. The Theses are a prolegomena to social theory based in human autonomy. In their retrospective focus Marx claims to present the radical Epilogue of all previous materialisms.

Marxist social theory depends upon man himself being continually re-assured of the humanistic basis for human theory and action. In these terms The Theses have a permanent place in Marxist thought. It would seem that Marxist social thought finds itself continually retracing its steps through Hegelian and post-Hegelian philosophy. The irony is that what may have only been intended as a fragment, 'a personal testimony' has subsequently become a cornerstone for our understanding of the subtlety of the theoretical achievements of Karl Marx: humanist.

Introduction:

1. A. Giddens Capitalism and Modern Social Theory 1971 p.20
2. Ref. letter Marx to Weydemeyer, 5 March 1852, quoted in T.B.Bottomore and M.Rubel Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy 1965. p.19
The influence of Henri de St. Simon is also important.
3. T.B.Bottomore (ed.) Karl Marx: Early Writings 1965. p.63
4. Bottomore. pp.44, 58, 60.
5. Bottomore. p.44
6. See A. van Leeuwen The Critique of Heaven and The Critique of Earth 1972, 1974.
7. S. Avineri The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx 1968. p.5.
8. Bottomore. p.44
9. Avineri pp 250ff 'Epilogue: The Eschatology of the Present'
10. F. Engels quoted in Giddens p.20.
11. G. Petrovic Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century 1968. pp.41-42.
12. Bottomore p.44
13. R.C. Tucker Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx 1961. p.23.
See also Avineri pp.4-5
14. Tucker pp.4-5
15. Bottomore p.43
16. Bottomore pp.53-54 see also Petrovic pp.41-42

The Essence of Feuerbach:

1. Bottomore and Rubel p.84
2. O'Malley 'Editor's Introduction' in Karl Marx: Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right' 1970 pp.xviiiiff
See also Chapter VI 'Marx and Feuerbach' pp.95ff
3. Tucker p.95
Giddens p.3
4. Quoted in Karl Barth 'Introductory Essay' in Ludwig Feuerbach The Essence of Christianity 1957. p.xi
5. Feuerbach Appendix 1. p.281
cf Bottomore p.52
6. Feuerbach Appendix 2. p.283
7. Quote in 'Introductory Essay' in Feuerbach pp.xi,xv
8. Feuerbach p.xiii
9. Feuerbach p.xiii
10. Tucker p. 96
11. F. Engels Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of Classical German Philosophy 1946. p.22
12. Tucker pp.79-80
13. O'Malley pp.xviiiiff
14. Tucker p.79

15. E. Kamenka The Ethical Foundations of Marxism 1972 pp.51-52
16. Maguire Marx's Paris Writings 1972 p.4
17. Quote in Avineri p.10
18. Avineri pp.9-10
19. Tucker pp.79-80

Commentary on the Theses:

+(Note: My notation in this section is (1:3) ie. Thesis No.1 Line 3)

1. Tucker pp.179-80
2. O'Malley pp.xxviiff
Tucker pp.103-4
3. See G.W.F. Hegel Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction 1975
p.28 That this Idea is true, eternal, and omnipotent, that it reveals itself in the world, and that nothing is revealed except the Idea in all its honour and majesty - this, as I have said, is what philosophy has proved, and we can therefore posit it as demonstrated for our present purposes World History is merely a manifestation of this one original reason; ... Reason is self-sufficient and contains its end within itself.
4. Avineri p.10
See also Giddens pp.21ff 'The Materialist Thesis'
5. Bottomore p.43
6. Bottomore and Rubel pp.84-85
7. Bottomore p.44
8. Bottomore p.43
9. Tucker p.80
10. T.W. Adorno in T.W. Adorno et al The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology p.76
11. Tucker p.24
12. Kamenka pp.41-42
Tucker pp.102-5
13. Feuerbach p.281
Bottomore p.208
O'Malley p.xli
14. Tucker pp.31ff espec. p.43
15. O'Malley pp.xxviiff
16. Maguire p.xxi
17. O'Malley pp.xxxff
18. Bottomore and Rubel pp.84-5
19. Bottomore p.44

Summation of Key Ideas:

1. Maguire p.4
2. Bottomore and Rubel p.84
3. O'Malley p.xxxv
4. Bottomore p.43
5. Feuerbach p.281
See also Tucker pp.95-105
Bottomore p.52 'The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the supreme being for man.'
6. Bottomore p.209
7. Bottomore p.52
Also Tucker p.12
8. Tucker pp.73ff

Conclusion:

1. Bottomore p.52

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